

## **FOOD ACCESS CONSTRAINTS ON THE POOR: CONTEMPORARY DYNAMICS AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS**

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### **Abstract**

*A large number of academic literature heavily focus on the classical challenge of food production by the year 2050 when the world population is estimated to be 9.6 billion. Concentrating solely on production is perilous as it ignores the fact that only sufficient production cannot guarantee food security. There are several other factors which ultimately determine a household's food security. This paper primarily argues the state of hunger for millions of the world's poor as a consequence of people's inadequate access to food. It further addresses the key food access constraints on poor people under present circumstances and under emerging climate change conditions. Above all, the paper justifies why food systems approach is more appropriate to critically analyze and effectively understand the present and future challenges of access to food for the poor.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Presently, a large number of literatures cast their attention towards the year 2050, a landmark year when the global population will reach to an estimated 9 billion. They prioritise the classical challenges of food production and discount the fact that about one in every eight people in the developing world still remains chronically underfed with an aggregate global food production exceeding present needs of the entire world population.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, the question of access to food that sustains the state of hunger for millions of the world's poor. This sets the platform for the paper as it proceeds to address the core food access constraints for poor people. The scope of its focus extends from present circumstances to the emerging climate change conditions in the future.

The paper begins with justifications of the food systems approach and its specific concern for the poor. The present accessibility constraints are then discussed from broader dynamics of land entitlement and market access challenges, and latent dynamics of food access limitations at the family levels in different societies. Although the link between climate change and food access

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<sup>1</sup> FAO, IFAD and WFP, *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2014: Strengthening the enabling environment for food security and nutrition* (Rome, FAO) 2014, p. 8.

constraints are largely explored from the food production aspect,<sup>2</sup> this paper examines other underlying issues such as stresses on resources and infrastructure, and livelihood vulnerabilities with due importance as well. In doing so, evolving policy implications in the domain of climate change are revisited. Above all, through the analytical lens of food systems the study manifests how economic abilities, socio-political power relations, and cultural orientations play decisive roles in poor people's food access endeavours.

### **FOOD SYSTEMS, FOOD SECURITY AND ACCESS TO FOOD**

Since the emergence of agriculture and the domestication of animals, food systems have constantly evolved with increasing diversity and complexity. In the present world, food systems not only involve the domain of production but also go deep into the process that associates food access scopes and challenges at large. In general, access to food refers to the capacity to acquire food by an individual or household either by means of its production or its purchase, what Amartya Sen termed as 'entitlements'.<sup>3</sup> In other words, food access is determined by the income-based and asset-based food entitlements and in many cases by their combination.<sup>4</sup> In order to understand the underlying constraints to food access, it is relevant to analyse the issue through the analytical lens of food systems rather than the food security concept.

Food systems, in general, refers to a certain set of activities related to production, exchange, distribution, consumption and purchase of food that affect the satisfaction of nutritional needs of a particular individual or household in a given time.<sup>5</sup> These activities, which have mutual correlations, are dependent on the degree and nature of entitlements. These entitlements, in turn, are dictated by the political, economic, socio-cultural and natural dynamics where the food systems have evolved. Food security, on the contrary, is a more popular concept in public policies that classically focuses on the volume and supply problems of basic foodstuffs at the international and national levels. Over time, the concept has encompassed a larger extent of issues ranging from food availability, food access and utilisation to overall stability.<sup>6</sup> Although access to food stands as one of the key pillars of food security, the issue is only dealt with at face value under this discourse rather than establishing an effective

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<sup>2</sup> P. J. Gregory, J. S. I. Ingram and M. Brklacich, "Climate change and food security", *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, Vol. 360, No. 1463, p. 2139.

<sup>3</sup> Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford, Clarendon Press) 1981.

<sup>4</sup> Terry Cannon, "Food Security, Food Systems and Livelihoods: Competing Explanations of Hunger", *Die Erde*, Vol. 133, No. 4, pp. 354-56.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> FAO, *Trade Reforms and Food Security: Conceptualizing the Linkages* (Rome, FAO Inter-Departmental Working Group) 2003, p. 28.

causation between entitlement challenges and hunger. Therefore, access to food may well be understood if we look at it through the alternative analytical framework of food systems analysis.

### POOR PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD

All societies have divergent views about the poor people. Different countries also consider different factors and thresholds to define the poor. In the European Union, for instance, poor are those whose disposable income after social transfers fall below 60% of the national median.<sup>7</sup> In China, the poverty line was defined as 2,300 Yuan per year in 2011 which is equivalent to a little less than US\$1 per day.<sup>8</sup> At the global level, the World Bank uses an international poverty line of US\$1.25 per day in 2005 prices which corresponds to the mean of the national poverty lines of the 15 poorest developing countries in terms of consumption per capita.<sup>9</sup> Although the World Bank poverty line represents very low threshold standard of living, this paper utilises this definition of poverty because of its wider acceptance and relative precision.

**Table-1: Poverty in 2011 by Region at \$1.25/day (2005 PPP)**

Region	Headcount (%)	Number of Poor (millions)
East Asia and the Pacific	7.9	160.8
Europe and Central Asia	0.5	2.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	4.6	27.6
Middle East and North Africa	1.7	5.6
South Asia	24.5	399.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	46.8	415.4
Total developing world	17.0	1,010.7
World	14.5	1,010.7

Source: World Bank (2014)<sup>10</sup>

Over one billion people that equivalents to 17% of the developing world population lived at or below \$1.25 per day in 2011.<sup>11</sup> According to the same data source, over 95% of these poor people were located in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and East Asia & Pacific combined. The rest of the poor lived in Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, and Eastern

<sup>7</sup> Great Britain Office for National Statistics, *Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK and EU, 2005-11* (Newport: Office of National Statistics) 2013, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> World Bank, “China Overview”, available at: <<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/china/overview>> (accessed on 14 December 2015).

<sup>9</sup> World Bank, *A Measured Approach to Ending Poverty and Boosting Shared Prosperity. Concepts, Data and the Twin Goals* (Washington DC, World Bank Group) 2014, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> World Bank, 2014, *op. cit.* p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> World Bank, “Poverty Overview”, available at: <<http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview>> (accessed on 14 December 2015).